

# Senator John Kavanagh

District 3

## Legislative Biography



AZ Sen. John Kavanagh is a Senator in the Arizona State Legislature who represents the 3rd district and received 100.0% of the vote in his last election. He is the Chair of the Appropriations and Budget committees, the Ranking Member of the Judiciary and Capital Review committees, and a member of the Joint Legislative Water, Director Nominations, and Government committees.

He works most frequently on Law (504 bills), Crime and Law Enforcement (479 bills), Arizona (322 bills), Economics and Public Finance (278 bills), and Education (208 bills). He has sponsored 830 bills in his last sixteen year(s) in office, voting with his party 93.7% of the time, getting 70.84% of his bills out of committee, and 31.33% of his sponsored bills enacted.

Sen. Kavanagh most frequently works on legislation with David Gowan (R-AZ-19) (222 bills), Steve Montenegro (R-AZ-29) (174 bills), and Gail Griffin (R-AZ-19) (169 bills). He most frequently votes with David Gowan (R-AZ-19) (92.91%), Wendy Rogers (R-AZ-7) (92.53%), and Janae Shamp (R-AZ-29) (92.17%).

Before entering politics, Sen. Kavanagh was involved in education. He received his undergraduate degree from New York University and a Doctorate from Rutgers University (NJ).

### About

Assumed Office - 2022

Next Election - 2026

Residence - Fountain Hills, AZ

Term - 2nd term

### Previous Experience

Arizona Representative, Arizona House of Representatives, 2019-2023

Member - Scottsdale Senior Services Board

Member - American Legion

Member - Friends of the Chamber of Commerce

US Armed Forces

Director - Scottsdale Community College; Administration of Justice Studies and Forensic Science Program

Instructor - Arizona State University

[Quorum Biography, [Accessed 3/1/2025](#)]

## Undermining American Democracy

Activity	Description	Category	Role
HB 2794	Bans election officials from altering voting deadlines	Voter Suppression	Co-sponsored
SR 1105	Holds county officials in contempt for refusing election “audit” subpoenas	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes
HCR 2023	Resolution opposing “For the People” Act	Voter Suppression	Co-sponsored, Voted Yes
HB 2905	Restricts mail ballot from being sent to all voters	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes
SB 1485	Allows purging voters from Permanent Early Voting List	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes
HB 2238	Ban Ballot Drop Boxes	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes
HB 2289	Eliminates Mall Voting/Early Voting/Vote Center and requires hand counting ballots	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes in Committee; Voted Yes
HB 2492	Proof of citizenship required for voting	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes in Committee; Voted Yes
HB 2319	"Transparency in Elections"	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes
SB 1011	Makes Municipal Elections Partisan	Voter Suppression	Prime Sponsor and Voted Yes
SB 1021	AG required to defend all State Legislature all passed by the Leg unless the AG gets permission from the Leg	Voter Suppression	Prime Sponsor and Voted Yes
HB 2415	Easier removal from early voting lists	Voter Suppression	Voted Yes
SB 1268	Imposes onerous red tape on unions	Anti-Labor	Voted Yes
SB 1377	Grants immunity from COVID-19-related liability	Anti-Labor	Co-sponsored, Voted Yes
HCR 2031	Preempts local wage and benefit ordinances	Anti-Labor	Voted Yes
HB 2001	Prohibits local ordinances on labor productivity	Anti-Labor	Voted Yes
SB 1278	Onerous paperwork for labor unions	Anti-Labor	Voted Yes
SB 1005	Eliminates penalties for parents suing teachers over curriculum and losing	Anti-Labor	Prime Sponsor and Voted Yes
SB 1108	Penalize localities for passing living wage ordinances.	Anti-Labor	Voted Yes
HB 2309	Criminalizes protests of seven or more people	Anti-First Amendment	Co-sponsored, Voted Yes
SB 1532	Prohibits teachers from discussing so-called “divisive issues” such as racism, sexism, bias and other social issues	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
SB 1456	Suppresses teaching of sex ed and gender identity	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
SB 1074	Bans public sector trainings on race, sex discrimination	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
SB 1165	Bans transgender students from participating on girls sports teams	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
SB 1138	Bans medical care for transgender youth	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
HB 2161	Requires teachers to report LGBTQ student to parents	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes

HB 2112	Bans instruction on race, ethnicity, or sex, threatening teachers with fines and losing their licenses	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
HCR 2001	Bans Critical Race Theory Through Constitutional Amendment	Anti-First Amendment	Voted Yes
HB 2016	Expands definition of residential picketing	Anti-First Amendment	Sponsored
SB 1305	Ban on Critical Race Theory	Culture Wars	Voted Yes
SB 1001	Pronoun Bill	Culture Wars	Voted Yes
SB 1040	Anti-Trans Bathroom Bill	Culture Wars	Voted Yes

## Disinformation

### Critical Race Theory

Here are examples of Representative John Kavanagh's social media posts misrepresenting Critical Race Theory to distort and, ultimately, silence arguments for racial justice & equality in the United States:

**July 25th, 2021** - *Critical race theory - A Democrat tool to divide and conquer.*<https://t.co/k9EMRKSdYa>

**July 9th, 2021** - *CopperCourier Banning the divisive and racist "theory" called critical race theory does not prevent teaching inclusion, diversity or the civil rights movement. I have no idea what they are talking about. Besides, SUSD says they do not teach CRT anyway, so what's the issue?*

**July 6th, 2021** - *We were told critical race theory didn't exist but now the National Educations Association voted to not only teach CRT in every school district in every state but they also want to go after parents and groups that are against CRT. Listen to the details.*  
<https://t.co/GCZZGXEHWq>

## Other

**In 2014, Kavanaugh made a series of racist statements at an event featuring Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio.** According to Salon, "Arizona state Rep. John Kavanagh made a series of racist remarks at a conservative conference this weekend, and has dismissed criticism from civil rights groups and Democratic lawmakers as 'creating controversy where it doesn't exist.'" The Southern Poverty Law Center recorded Kavanagh's comments during a 'roast' of Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio." The racist remarks were varied and denigrated multiple minority groups. Below are highlights of his racist remarks:

### Comments disparaging Latinos

"I'm not the federal monitor. How many Hispanics did you pull over on the way over here, Arpaio?" Kavanagh asked the audience early on, a reference to Arizona's SB 1070 and the rampant racial profiling faced by immigrants and communities of color across the state. Arpaio's department is

currently being monitored after a federal investigation concluded that his office relied on racial profiling and illegal detentions to target Latinos.”

### **Comments disparaging Muslims**

“Kavanagh also commented on Arizona's ‘license to discriminate’ bill, which he supported. ‘Now a lot of people claim that SB 1062 is gonna cause discrimination based upon religion in Arizona,’ he said. ‘And I scoffed at that until tonight. When a Muslim waiter serving up here walked up to Sheriff Joe, wouldn’t give him his dinner ‘cause he said ‘I don’t serve swine.’”

### **Comments disparaging Asians**

“‘Oh, Korea? See, all these years I figured he was rounding up Hispanics because he had a grudge from the Spanish-American War,’ he remarked. ‘So if you were in the Korean War, how come you’re not rounding up Asians?’”

In response to criticisms of his racist remarks, Kavanaugh claimed critics were playing politics and dismissed his words as “satire.” [Salon, [2/28/2014](#)]

**Kavanagh was listed as a member of two far-right Facebook groups.** According to the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights special report, Breach the Mainstream: A National Survey Of Far-Right Membership In State Legislatures, then-Representative John Kavanagh belonged to two far-right Facebook groups: Arizona Parents' Rights In Education and Tea Party of Scottsdale. This report documents public Facebook groups that espouse “election denial, COVID denial, anti-vaccine ‘health freedom,’ Islamophobia, antisemitic conspiracies, attacks on Black Lives Matter and Black history under the anti-‘Critical Race Theory’ banner, anti-abortion, ‘groomer’ anti-LGBTQIA bigotry, and even open appeals to white nationalism.” [IREHR, [5/19/2022](#)]

**Kavanagh, an ex-cop, sponsored legislation to restrict filming of police officers from up to 15 feet away.** Senator Kavanagh sponsored House Bill 2319, which would make it unlawful for someone to film police from up to 15 feet away while officers are engaged in “law enforcement activity”. The violation would be a “petty offense,” but if a person “fails to comply with a verbal warning” or has been previously convicted for filming police officers, they would face a class 3 misdemeanor and up to 30 days in jail. Kavanagh said he initially got the idea to run the bill because he had seen stories of “groups” of people going around filming police. According to K.M. Bell, ACLU Arizona’s Smart Justice campaign strategist, “In terms of protecting the officers, if someone is standing there holding a cell phone, it does not endanger the officer in any way.” The final bill restricted filming from 8 feet and was signed into law by Governor Ducey on July 6th. [[AZ HB 2319](#), signed by Governor, 7.6.2022; AZ Mirror, [1/19/2022](#)]

**Kavanagh introduced legislation that criminalized protesting as a felony.** In December 2023, Arizona Senator John Kavanagh proposed legislation advocating stricter penalties for individuals who engage in protests. Previously, blocking traffic to create an "inconvenience or hazard" was considered a class 2 misdemeanor, punishable by up to four months in a county jail and a \$750 fine. According to his legislation, obstructing 200 vehicles or people on a highway, bridge, or tunnel for

more than 15 minutes after being instructed to stop by a police officer would be classified as a class 6 felony, which can result in jail time ranging from four months to nearly six years. [3TV/CBS 5, [12/27/2023](#)]

**Kavanagh sponsored legislation attacking transgender students.** Senator John Kavanagh sponsored Senate Concurrent Resolution 1013, which combined two past attacks on preferred pronoun use and inclusive policies in schools. According to the Phoenix New Times, “Faced with the certainty of Gov. Katie Hobbs’ veto, GOP lawmakers are hoping to circumvent her entirely by sending a proposal to voters in November that would restrict how teachers respect the identities of their trans students, and bar those same students from using school facilities that best fit who they are. ‘This bypasses the governor and goes right to the ballot, where — if all the polling I’ve seen is correct — it’ll probably pass with 60, 65 percent of voters who don’t really believe that this type of stuff should be going on in our schools,’ said Sen. John Kavanagh. Senate Concurrent Resolution 1013 combined two bills rejected by Hobbs last year that targeted preferred pronoun use and inclusive policies in schools. The proposal would have required that teachers obtain written parental permission before using a student’s preferred pronouns or name and mandate that schools separate their restrooms, locker rooms, and sleeping accommodations by biological sex and provide a single-occupancy alternative for trans students.” [[SCR1013](#), Senate First Read, 01/24/2024; Phoenix News Times, [2/14/2024](#)]

**In 2021, Kavanagh commented that the “quality of votes” was more important than access to voting.** After President Donald Trump attempted to overturn the 2020 election, Republicans in Arizona advanced dozens of voter suppression bills. Speaking to CNN in 2021, Senator Kavanagh gave his rationale for why there needed to be much stricter voter suppression measures in Arizona, saying, “Not everybody wants to vote, and if somebody is uninterested in voting, that probably means that they’re totally uninformed on the issues... Quantity is important, but we have to look at the quality of votes, as well.” [CNN, [3/11/2021](#)]

**Kavanagh publicly stated he wanted to cut off funding to Arizona PBS after it offered then-gubernatorial candidate Katie Hobbs an interview.** According to KTAR, “John Kavanagh accused the public television station, which is part of the Arizona State University Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, of putting ‘their thumb on the scale of an election’ in Hobbs’ favor...adding ‘Government has no business running TV stations. We’re not China. We’re not Venezuela. We’re not Russia. Government doesn’t control the flow of information.’” [KTAR, [10/18/2022](#)]

**Kavanaugh mocked a colleague’s invocation in 2019, claiming they had “hijacked” the prayer.** In February 2019, then-State Representative John Kavanagh mocked a secular invocation delivered by fellow Representative Athena Salman on the House floor. Salman, an atheist, had asked legislators to reflect on the “wonders of the universe” and the diversity of life on an “insignificant planet in an insignificant galaxy,” without referencing a deity. Kavanagh responded by delivering a speech that ridiculed Salman’s secular invocation, prompting protests from Salman and fellow

Democrats, who accused Kavanaugh of exhibiting "behavior unbecoming of a member" in violation of the chamber's rules. [Phoenix New Times, [2/15/2019](#)]

**Kavanaugh introduced legislation banning transgender citizens from accessing their preferred bathrooms.** In 2013, then-Representative John Kavanaugh introduced legislation to prohibit transgender individuals from using public bathrooms that did not align with their birth-assigned sex. Kavanaugh's bill would have allowed police to demand identification from individuals suspected of using the 'wrong' restroom, with violations punishable by up to six months in jail and a \$2,500 fine under disorderly conduct charges. Following intense public backlash, Kavanaugh withdrew the proposal. [Salon, [3/20/2013](#)]

**Kavanaugh introduced legislation limiting disability lawsuits.** Arizona State Senator John Kavanaugh sponsored legislation to limit disability access lawsuits against businesses under the Arizonans with Disabilities Act. The bill, approved in 2017, granted businesses a 30-day period to correct accessibility violations before facing litigation. Disability rights advocates opposed the measure, arguing it weakened protections for individuals with disabilities. Despite massive opposition to the proposal, then-Governor Doug Ducey signed the bill into law. [Associated Press, [4/18/2017](#)]

**Kavanaugh sponsored legislation requiring the Arizona Attorney General to defend all state laws, even those deemed unconstitutional or indefensible.** In January 2023, Arizona State Senator John Kavanaugh introduced Senate Bill 1021, which mandates that the Attorney General defend all state laws against legal challenges. This proposal came after then-Attorney General Mark Brnovich declined to defend a 2021 law that prohibited recording law enforcement within eight feet, a law Kavanaugh had sponsored. The bill was blocked by a federal judge, and Brnovich's refusal to appeal the decision prompted Kavanaugh to push for legislation ensuring the Attorney General's obligation to defend all state laws. Governor Katie Hobbs would go on to veto the measure [Arizona Mirror, [1/18/2023](#); KJZZ, [3/29/2023](#)]